EPA The United States Environmental Protection Agency's

Asian American & Pacific Islander

Outreach Strategy

for Community Partnerships

Community Partnerships

When building community relationships, it's important to remember that there is no typical Asian American or Pacific Islander. AAPIs come from culturally and geographically diverse origins and speak different languages and dialects. Many of these individuals also come as refugees from war-torn countries where there is an inherent distrust of government.

Reaching out to this vast and disparate population means that EPA must first and foremost listen to and address the specific issues facing individual AAPI communities—ranging from brownfields redevelopment to the consumption of contaminated seafood. The Agency also must use culturally appropriate media channels and translate educational materials into AAPI languages.

EPA has demonstrated its commitment to community partnerships by supporting the first-ever seafood consumption study focusing on AAPIs in King County, Washington. The Agency is also working with AAPI communities to ensure environmental justice, to protect workers, and to improve children's health—especially those living in urban areas—through education and training on issues such as indoor air, lead, and pesticides.

The following articles illustrate some of the ways EPA is working with AAPI communities to build effective partnerships.

Seafood Consumption in the Pacific Northwest

Seafood offers a host of nutritional benefits, from low fat to high protein. Many AAPI groups consider the collection and consumption of seafood a healthy activity that reflects a traditional way of life. Harvesting seafood is also an economic necessity for many AAPIs. But there are potential concerns associated with eating seafood. Contaminants that enter the water (through industrial discharges and other means) can collect in the tissues of fish and shellfish, posing health risks to the people who eat them. AAPIs are particularly at risk because seafood is a large part of their diet.

In the 1990s, EPA funded a study to examine seafood consumption patterns among AAPI groups in King County, Washington. The study was significant in several ways. First, very few seafood consumption studies have been done for ethnic groups, and the information collected through this effort provides new insights into the consumption patterns and food preparation practices among AAPIs. In addition, the study was culturally balanced and examined the practices of many different ethnic groups, reflecting the great diversity of AAPI populations. Perhaps most important, the study was designed by the community for the community, so it truly engaged and involved the people most affected by the results.

Getting Started

In 1994, it became common knowledge that AAPIs in King County were being exposed to contaminants at hazardous waste sites in the area. People were seen collecting seaweed from the beaches and harvesting seafood from the Puget Sound.

Dr. Roseanne Lorenzana, a toxicologist at EPA's Region 10 office, decided to go to the area and talk firsthand to the AAPI community. Dr. Lorenzana described her attempts at communicating with the people she encountered as "two magnets opposing each other." The more she tried, the further they stepped back.

Dr. Lorenzana realized that she needed a different approach if she wanted to build trust and communicate effectively with the AAPI community. First, she hired an intern who knew leaders in both the Japanese and Filipino communities. Next, she enlisted the aid of the Refugee Federation Service Center (RFSC), the largest social aid organization for recent immigrants and refugees in King County. The agency's bilingual/bicultural staff and volunteers speak a variety of Asian languages and maintain affiliations with several AAPI community groups.

EPA awarded two grants to the RFSC to assess the seafood consumption patterns of 10 ethnic groups in King County: Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Laotian,

> *I thought it was important for the community to design the study to the extent possible.*
>
> —Dr. Roseanne Lorenzana
> EPA Region 10

Mien, Samoan, and Vietnamese. The study also would examine seafood preparation and cooking methods and develop culturally appropriate health messages. To ensure the messages effectively reached the community, the study also would determine how AAPIs prefer to receive information.

Committee Involvement

To interest and involve AAPI leaders in the study, RFSC set up three committees. The 15 members of the Community Steering Committee each belonged to at least one of the ethnic groups being surveyed and was affiliated with one or more community organizations. Having community contacts was important for facilitating the networking and outreach efforts of the study's staff. This committee also oversaw every facet of the study and provided recommendations on specific cultural issues, such as how to approach the community.

According to Dr. Lorenzana, "I learned that you couldn't just call up a person, or go to someone's home and hand them a survey to fill out." There are culturally appropriate ways to visit a home and greet people to set the stage for appropriate communication, she noted.

The Community Steering Committee also would ensure that a culturally acceptable survey instrument was developed. "I thought it was important for the community to design the study to the extent possible," Dr. Lorenzana said.

The other two committees provided technical assistance and helped ensure that the study was relevant and applicable to different interested agencies and ethnic groups in King County. A first-generation Chinese American was also brought on board as a statistician. In addition, the University of Washington's community outreach office got involved at this point. "The university saw the study as something new and innovative and wanted to participate," Dr. Lorenzana said.

Study Results

Based on the consumption patterns of 202 respondents, the study found that:

- AAPIs generally consumed seafood at a very high rate, even higher than some Native American tribes in the area who maintain a traditional subsistence harvest from local estuaries and rivers.
- AAPIs of all income and education levels ate about the same amount of seafood, and there was no statistical difference in consumption rates between men and women.

- Members of the Vietnamese and Japanese communities consumed the most seafood, while Mien, Hmong, and Samoan community members consumed the least amount of seafood.
- Shellfish was eaten most often and in the highest amount. More than half of the AAPIs surveyed ate fish skin and crab butter. This information was useful because toxins can concentrate in higher levels in different parts of fish and shellfish.
- First-generation AAPIs and people older than 55 years old consumed the most seafood in nearly all categories. Nonetheless, second-generation AAPIs still consumed more seafood than the "average" American.

The amount of seafood harvested locally was relatively small, varying from 3 percent to 21 percent, depending on the seafood type. Dr. Lorenzana was somewhat surprised that more people were not harvesting seafood from local waters, although the study indicated that individual small groups did fish extensively from Puget Sound. She noted that because the study was designed to sample so many groups, the insight into the behavior of any one ethnicity was limited.

Based on the study's results, a brochure was developed, translated into the 10 languages, and tested with focus groups. The publication describes risks from eating bad seafood, types of contaminants found in seafood, and populations most at risk, such as the elderly and children. It also offers suggestions to reduce potential risks, including understanding which types of seafood are most likely to cause problems, knowing where the seafood comes from, and using safe preparation and cooking practices.

Next Steps

The work is not over. The logical next step is to test for contaminant types and amounts in the different seafood species being consumed by AAPI groups in King County. Ultimately, Dr. Lorenzana hopes EPA can conduct a risk assessment that would clarify the risks to these communities. But this study was a meaningful first step toward engaging the community in an important local health issue and raising awareness of seafood safety.

Getting the Word Out

The study found that the preferred learning methods among the respondents were:

1. Books and pamphlets (69 percent)
2. Verbal communication (55 percent)
3. Videos (35 percent)

The preferred information sources were:

1. AAPI community newspapers/ newsletters (75 percent)
2. Television (65 percent)
3. Word of mouth (60 percent)

Mercury Action Plan

Recent studies have shown an increase in U.S. fish consumption, particularly among AAPIs. According to EPA's 1997 Mercury Report to Congress, AAPIs "consume fish more often than do other population members." This is a concern for EPA because once mercury is released into the environment, it can reach a body of water and contaminate fish at a level that is hazardous to humans.

In response to the high levels of mercury that are being produced, EPA is drafting the Mercury Action Plan. The plan's purpose is to address voluntary and regulatory actions that the Agency is taking to reduce mercury releases into the environment, as well as help coordinate EPA mercury-related activities. In addition, the plan identifies industry sectors that the Agency and other interested stakeholders, such as the AAPI community, can work with to reduce or eliminate mercury in manufacturing processes and products.

Solid waste incineration and fossil fuel combustion contribute about 87 percent of the mercury emissions in the United States. Mercury can also be released into the environment through a variety of other ways, including mining and smelting activities, and wastewater treatment facilities, which may release mercury directly into water bodies.

EPA regulates air emissions from the leading major mercury sources, including coal-fired electric utilities and municipal, medical, and hazardous waste incinerators.

Educating the public about mercury exposure is critical, particularly for groups such as AAPIs, who ingest fish as a significant part of their diet. EPA has published several documents that include *Should I Eat the Fish I Catch*, which was translated into Hmong and Vietnamese, and the *Seafood Consumption Study*, which was translated into Cambodian, Filipino, Laotian, Samoan, Korean, and Vietnamese. Such materials are vital for communicating to AAPI communities the potential health hazards of mercury.

Environmental Justice for Philadelphia's Chinatown

Redevelopment of blighted areas can provide obvious benefits to a community, particularly when those areas include brownfields. In some cases, however, redevelopment efforts can adversely impact a community, especially in areas comprised of low-income populations or people of color. In Philadelphia's Chinatown district, a baseball stadium development project proposed by the city became a concern for the AAPI community, which believed the stadium would hinder retail growth, intensify traffic and air pollution, and contribute to parking congestion.

The Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) rallied local forces and outside support to persuade the city to reconsider its proposal. The PCDC approached EPA's Region 3 office to tap the Agency's support in opposing the construction of a stadium at 12th and Vine Streets.

Primarily, the proposed stadium would have "continued the stunting of Chinatown," said Andrew Toy, a 10-year board member for the PCDC, during a City Council hearing in 2000. Chinatown is almost completely surrounded by development, including the Vine Street Expressway, Independence Mall, and the Convention Center. The stadium's location would have dashed any hopes for expanding Chinatown northward.

According to the PCDC, Chinatown has lost 25 percent of its housing and businesses due to urban renewal projects. Even so, Chinatown's population has quadrupled during the past decade, said John Chin, the PCDC's executive director. The population surge has caused many residents to live in substandard housing and overcrowded conditions, which leaves little choice but for Chinatown to expand, Chin said. "The stadium would have pinned us in from all sides," he added.

To aid the community in its effort, EPA toured the site and provided the PCDC with a geographic information system (GIS) map, which detailed census and environmental data about the site. Such information helped the PCDC clearly identify what was at stake if a baseball stadium was built.

EPA also worked to involve the Pennsylvania State Department of Environmental Protection

Ensuring Environmental Justice

Over the last decade, Americans have become increasingly aware that minority populations and/or low-income populations bear a disproportionate amount of adverse health and environmental effects. EPA established an Environmental Justice program to ensure that communities comprised mainly of people of color or low-income populations receive equal protection under environmental laws.

We've worked hard with the state DEP to build a strong awareness of environmental justice issues—and I think we've been successful.

—Samantha Fairchild
Director of the Office of Enforcement, Compliance, and Environmental Justice
EPA Region 3

(DEP). EPA toured the site again with the DEP, and even took DEP officials to a local Chinatown restaurant to further discuss the environmental justice issues of the proposed stadium, such as traffic and air pollution.

"We've worked hard with the state DEP to build a strong awareness of environmental justice issues—and I think we've been successful," said Samantha Fairchild, Director of the Office of Enforcement, Compliance, and Environmental Justice for EPA Region 3.

The city's mayor eventually rescinded the proposal, citing financial factors, not environmental justice. However, because of the efforts of EPA and the PCDC, environmental justice issues faced by communities such as Chinatown gained significant attention by local and state authorities. In addition, this scenario helped demonstrate the power of public participation in achieving environmental equity.

Source: PCDC

Ignatius Wang, a board member of the PCDC, addresses attendees at a Stadium Out of Chinatown meeting. To Wang's immediate left is PCDC executive director John Chin; at left are councilman Frank DiCicco and Cecila Yep.

What Is a Brownfield?

A brownfield is an abandoned, idled, or underused industrial and commercial facility at which expansion or redevelopment is complicated by real or perceived environmental contamination. Examples of brownfields include abandoned factories, lots, gas stations, and warehouses.

Lowell, Massachusetts, where the AAPI community makes up a significant portion of the population, has targeted 17 brownfield sites for redevelopment. Lowell's redevelopment efforts have leveraged more than $100 million in funding.

Seattle and King County, Washington, which also have a significant AAPI population, are looking for ways to clean up and redevelop the 8,500-acre Duwamish industrial corridor, with more than 200 contaminated properties.

Giving AAPI Communities a Voice

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 48 percent of AAPIs have lived in this country for 20 years or less, and certain groups—such as Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, Hmong, Samoans, and Tongans—have immigrated to the United States mainly within the past 30 years. These newer immigrants face greater environmental hazards as a result of high unemployment, low education levels, and language barriers.

The Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) is working to organize community leaders and to build grassroots organizations in these and other AAPI communities. These groups or leaders can then act as partners with APEN and collaborate with other organizations working on environmental justice issues. "Environmental justice" is the term used to describe efforts made toward addressing the disproportionate environmental hazards that minority and low-income communities often face.

> *For AAPI communities, environmental justice is about improving our overall quality of life. To do this, we need to develop mechanisms to promote meaningful community participation.*
>
> —Joselito Laudencia, executive director of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network

APEN has worked closely with EPA in recent years to augment AAPIs' voice on environmental issues. The group helped the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) develop a document that outlined a model for public participation, which was distributed to government agencies at all levels. (NEJAC is a Federal Advisory Committee established in 1993 to provide independent consultation and recommendations to the Administrator of EPA on matters related to environmental justice.) APEN also mobilized AAPIs to participate in public forums regarding issues affecting their communities and facilitated a meeting in 1998 in Oakland for NEJAC to hear firsthand the issues faced by a local Southeast Asian community.

Source: APEN

To date, most of APEN's work has centered on San Francisco, where the organization is based, and the Bay Area. For example, APEN launched the Laotian Organizing Project (LOP), which aims to build a democratic infrastructure within the

Laotian community in the Richmond area of West Contra Costa County to help it resolve environmental justice issues. The LOP effort has led to a number of improvements, including the formation of a teacher advisory program at Richmond High School, where students faced a lack of counseling resources. In the pilot program, at least one adult provides guidance to each student. In addition, the LOP persuaded Contra Costa County to implement a multilingual emergency phone alert system to boost awareness of environmental and health hazards among non-English-speaking community members.

APEN is also working to build networks beyond the Bay Area and California. APEN's ultimate goal is to create a national network through which AAPIs and other minority communities can voice their concerns and effectively enhance their quality of life.

Source: APEN

APEN's Laotian Organizing Project has successfully mobilized the community to participate in a variety of environmental issues.

Toward that end, APEN collaborated with five other environmental justice networks to create the Environmental Justice Fund, which provides a forum for environmental justice groups to develop resources. The fund is also designed to distribute resources equitably to environmental justice groups.

Reaching Out to Korean Dry Cleaners

Approximately 30 percent of dry cleaning businesses in the United States are owned by first-generation Koreans. Because of the potential health and environmental concerns associated with perchloroethylene, or "perc," a chemical solvent used by most dry cleaners and a suspected carcinogen, EPA and stakeholders from the dry cleaning industry and public interest groups have been working together to evaluate new technologies, process controls, and chemical substitutions.

To reach these key stakeholders, EPA's Design for the Environment's Garment and Textile Care Program (GTCP) translated several educational and informational publications into Korean. GTCP has also been working with the Federation of Korean Dry Cleaners Associations and the International Fabricare Institute to inform Korean business owners about alternative technologies that can improve their operations and profit while contributing to a cleaner environment and safer workplace.

Peer Training in Oakland

In 1999, the Korean Community Center of the East Bay in Oakland, California, received an EPA grant to fund the Peer Leadership Program, which enlisted and trained peer leaders to provide community-based outreach to Korean American dry cleaners, who constitute nearly 60 percent of all dry cleaner owners and operators in California.

Peer leaders shared information on the potential health risks associated with the use of perchloroethylene. They also discussed alternative technologies such as wet cleaning, which uses controlled applications of soap and water and washer speeds to clean clothes without solvents. The peer leaders also facilitated voluntary compliance with both federal and local environmental regulations and conducted comprehensive facility inspections covering air quality, chemicals, pollution prevention, and record-keeping.

Under the EPA grant, the program trained 15 peer leaders and evaluated 60 dry cleaners in the Bay Area.

Protecting Generations

In recent years, EPA has worked to improve its understanding of how environmental hazards pose risks to sensitive populations, particularly children. AAPI youth, like other children in America, face a wide array of hazards, including:

- Lead poisoning from lead-based paint and dust found in older buildings, soil, water pipes, and other sources.
- Direct and indirect exposures to pesticides used in homes, schools, farms, and elsewhere, as well as to pesticide residues on certain foods.
- Exposures to indoor and outdoor air pollutants, including secondhand smoke, that can result in respiratory illnesses and asthma.
- Exposures to mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and other chemical and microbial contaminants from swimming in polluted surface waters, drinking contaminated water, and eating certain fish and shellfish.
- Exposure to toxic waste from abandoned industrial sites located near communities.
- Overexposure to the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays, which can cause skin cancer, cataracts, and other medical problems in adulthood.

EPA is working with schools, parents, communities, medical professionals, and other groups to educate AAPIs about environmental threats to children and preventive actions. The Agency also is encouraging community-right-to-know efforts and public participation through a variety of grants and EPA regional projects.

Educating Families About Lead Poisoning

Lead poisoning crosses all socioeconomic, geographic, and racial boundaries, but the burden falls disproportionately on low-income and minority families. In the mid-1990s, EPA provided funding to launch an ongoing lead education program in ethnic communities in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The program has been successful in raising awareness of lead poisoning among the city's Southeast Asian—primarily Hmong and Laotian—and Hispanic communities and in identifying homes with high lead levels.

The program's goal was to reach out to families served by the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center and teach them about lead hazards in the home to prevent their children from

Peeling, chipping, and cracking lead-based paints are hazardous to children.

being lead-poisoned. Many children in these families had elevated levels of lead in their blood but were not being routinely tested.

Bilingual workers living in the community went door-to-door, talking with parents about potential lead hazards in their homes and ways to protect their children. The workers conducted "finger-stick" blood lead tests on residents. When lead was detected in the home, workers provided additional information on managing and abating the problem. Educational materials were translated into Hmong, and further outreach was conducted via community groups and festivals.

As a result of the project, the AAPI community in Milwaukee is more aware of lead hazards and how to protect their children from lead poisoning. In fact, lead poisoning of children identified through the study has dropped by 60 percent.

Taking Actions to Reduce "Chinese Chalk" Use

"Chinese Chalk" is an illegal and dangerous pesticide that is often marketed to AAPIs. Applied on floors and baseboards to control crawling insects, the chalk contains chemicals that can cause health effects and allergic reactions. This product is imported form China, but because it is unregistered in the United States, its ingredients and packaging are unregulated.

Chinese Chalk is particularly hazardous to children. Once removed from the package, this pesticide product is easily confused with blackboard chalk. The colorful boxes used to package these products also have been found to contain high levels of lead and other heavy metals, which can be a problem because of children's hand-to-mouth behavior. In addition, because Chinese Chalk is powder-based, its poisonous properties can become airborne.

EPA Regions 5 and 9 have issued warnings to alert AAPIs of the dangers of this product and to recommend safer alternatives to manage pests. The Agency is also taking enforcement actions to stop the product's distribution. In 1998, EPA ordered one of the chalk's distributors to stop selling the product; the company had actively marketed the product to schools and consumers on the Internet and in newspaper advertisements. This is a significant accomplishment given that it is difficult to stop the sale of the products, which are typically marketed at flea markets, swap meets, and small retail venues.

Chinese chalk is an illegal and dangerous pesticide.

Raising Awareness of Indoor Air Pollutants

It's no mystery that childhood asthma is on the rise. Asthma is the most prevalent chronic illness in our nation's children. Each year, nearly 300 children die from this condition, and approximately 150,000 children are hospitalized. The problem affects American youth of all races and ethnic groups, but it is most severe among low-income, inner-city, and minority children.

Many pollutants can cause or contribute to asthma, but some of the most common triggers are indoor air pollutants such as dust and molds. In 1999, the Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO) received an EPA grant to help raise awareness of asthma and indoor air quality issues in AAPI communities. AAPCHO is an association of 14 community health centers around the country.

> *AAPCHO is very proud of the work we've done with these projects, for we were able to further raise awareness about indoor air issues within AAPI communities that were not adequately being reached.*
>
> —Jeff Caballero,
> Executive Director of AAPCHO

The organization translated several EPA educational brochures on asthma triggers, radon, and carbon monoxide into Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean and distributed them through their member centers in Washington, Massachusetts, New York, California, and Hawai'i. AAPCHO also sent the documents to organizations that requested them.

According to Jeff Caballero, Executive Director of AAPCHO, the materials have been well received by the AAPI communities, particularly in Worcester, Massachusetts, Boston, and Seattle, and have been instrumental in detecting several cases of asthma and radon.

The association also examined AAPIs' knowledge and attitudes toward indoor air quality issues in several cities and provided training to health care workers serving AAPI communities.

Through these projects, AAPCHO is providing resources and skills to community-based organizations that serve AAPIs and is helping these organizations collaborate with local partners working on indoor air issues. The projects also are empowering individuals to make changes in their homes to reduce the prevalence of asthma among AAPI children and upgrade the quality of life of families.

Protecting Workers From Pesticide Hazards

EPA's Worker Protection Standard (WPS) seeks to protect the more than 3.5 million U.S. agricultural workers and pesticide handlers who work with these potentially hazardous chemicals. The standard requires employers to provide personal protective equipment, safety training, and access to emergency assistance. They also must adhere to a number of other guidelines.

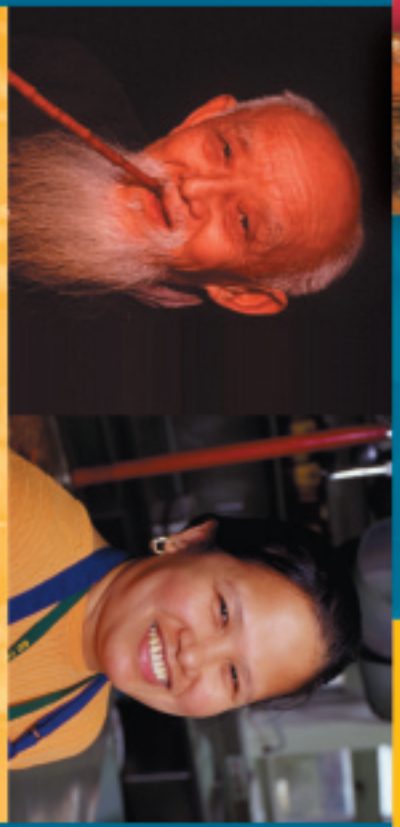
In order to reach AAPI populations that would be affected by the standard, EPA has translated an informational pamphlet on the WPS into eight languages, including Laotian, Thai, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and Mandarin Chinese. EPA is also working with state extension agents and state agricultural agencies to reach small farm groups who may be unaware of the dangers of pesticides.

EPA also is assessing its efforts in reaching out to AAPIs and other non-English-speaking workers to determine if the program is meeting its goals and to break down remaining language and cultural barriers.

United States
Environmental Protection Agency
Ariel Rios Building
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW.
Washington, DC 20460

www.epa.gov

EPA-202-K-01-003
September 2001



Printed on paper that contains at least 50 percent postconsumer fiber.